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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003564

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ITALY ON "FUTURE OF IRAQ" EXPERT WORKING GROUPS

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REF: SECSTATE 130333

CLASSIFIED BY: CLASSIFIED BY: ACTING DCM THOMAS COUNTRYMAN FOR REASONS
1.5 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: THE GOI GENERALLY SUPPORTS OUR "FUTURE OF IRAQ" WORKING GROUPS PROPOSAL AND IS ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN THE AREAS OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION. WHILE ITALY VERY MUCH WANTS A DIFFERENT IRAQI GOVERNMENT IN POWER, IT IS CONCERNED ABOUT WHO WILL SUCCEED SADDAM. IN THE VIEW OF THE ITALIANS, EITHER THE ISLAMISTS GAINING POWER IN IRAQ OR THE DESTABILIZATION OF THE PERSIAN GULF REGION WOULD BE AS BAD AS -- OR WORSE THAN -- SADDAM'S CURRENT REGIME. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) POLOFF DELIVERED REF DEMARCHE TO LUIGI MACCOTTA, THE MFA'S OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR THE PERSIAN GULF AND ROGUE STATES, AND EMANUELE FARRUGIA, DEPUTY OFFICE DIRECTOR AND DESK OFFICER FOR IRAQ. ON THE PRIORITIES OF THE WORKING GROUPS, FARRUGIA SUGGESTED THAT THE FOREIGN AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY GROUP COME FIRST TO ALLOW THE UNCONDITIONAL RETURN OF UN WEAPONS INSPECTORS. ON ITALY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE IRAQI PEOPLE, FARRUGIA EXPLAINED THAT THE GOI

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FOCUSES -- AND WILL LIKELY FOCUS -- ITS EFFORTS IN IRAQ ON TWO DOMAINS: PUBLIC HEALTH AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION. IT IS NOT EASY TO DEAL WITH THE BUREAUCRATIC IRAQI GOVERNMENT THAT CONSIDERS ANY NGO PART OF AN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, COMMENTED FARRUGIA. THAT SAID, THE ITALIAN EXPERTS IN IRAQ HAVE DEVELOPED GOOD CONTACTS IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THEIR TASKS.

13. (C) AMONG EU COUNTRIES, ITALY HAS BEEN ONE OF IRAQ'S MOST IMPORTANT TRADING PARTNERS FOR MANY YEARS. THIS CHANGED AFTER SEPTEMBER 11. ITALY'S EXPORTS TO IRAQ FELL FROM 5% TO 1% OF THE OIL FOR FOOD PROGRAM ALLOWANCE OVER THE PAST YEAR, EXPLAINED FARRUGIA. THAT WAS THE ECONOMIC PRICE ITALY PAID FOR ITS POLITICAL DECISION TO REDUCE OFFICIAL CONTACTS WITH IRAQ, WHICH DID NOT TAKE A CLEAR STAND ON TERRORISM, HE SAID.

14. (C) FARRUGIA STRESSED THAT A MILITARY ATTACK WOULD NOT BE ITALY'S FIRST OPTION FOR DEALING WITH SADDAM, DUE IN PART TO CONCERNS ABOUT THE STABILITY OF THE REGION. ABSENT CAREFUL PLANNING, STRESSED FARRUGIA, THERE IS A REAL POSSIBILITY FOR THE DESTABILIZATION OF IRAQ AND THE REGION POST-SADDAM. THE GOI IS "KEEN ON SUPPORTING SECULAR REGIMES, EVEN IF THEY ARE DICTATORIAL IN NATURE, OVER

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ISLAMIC REGIMES." THAT IS WHY THE GOI IS SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENTS IN TUNISIA AND ALGERIA. IF THE SECULAR SADDAM REGIME FALLS, ARGUED FARRUGIA, IRAQ RUNS THE RISK OF BECOMING A RADICAL SHIITE SOCIETY. HE ADDED THAT THE IRANIAN RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES RELY HEAVILY ON THE IRAQIS IN EXILE IN IRAN, WHO TEND TO BE MOST RADICAL. AN IRAQ SHIITE STATE REPLACING SADDAM'S REGIME COULD PRODUCE ANOTHER IRAN AND BLOCK THE WAY OF REFORM, STRESSED FARRUGIA.

15. (C) THE KURDISH ISSUE IS SO IMPORTANT THAT IT OUGHT TO HAVE ITS OWN WORKING GROUP, ARGUED FARRUGIA. THE KURDS OUGHT TO ENJOY THEIR CULTURAL AUTONOMY.

HOWEVER, THE KURDS COULD PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE
STABILIZATION OF A POST-SADDAM
IRAQ. THEY ARE USUALLY SUNNIS AND SECULAR, AND THUS COULD
ENSURE THE
CONTINUITY OF A SECULAR IRAQ POST-SADDAM, STATED FARRUGIA.

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